

Report from Margaret Thomas

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Here's a brief update on some of the key Norfolk County Council issues and activity from the past month.

Norfolk County Council Updates

Love Your Market Town Grant Scheme

The Love Your Market Town grant scheme has reopened, providing grants of between £1,000 and £5,000 to support projects that increase footfall and encourage people to spend more time in Norfolk's market towns. Projects may include community events, themed festivals, town trails and activities that promote local pride and encourage visitors and residents to support local businesses. Initial ideas must be submitted by 31 August 2026.

Libraries and Summer Reading Challenge

Norfolk Libraries are supporting the Summer Reading Challenge, themed *Read to the Beat*. The challenge encourages children to develop reading habits through music-related activities and events being held across Norfolk libraries and mobile libraries throughout the summer.

Norfolk and Norwich Millennium Library

Following a £1.3 million refurbishment, the Norfolk and Norwich Millennium Library will reopen on 29 July. Improvements include enhanced accessibility, additional study space, improved children's and teenage facilities, charging points and a new events space.

Community Wellbeing

Feel Connected Campaign

Public Health Norfolk's Feel Connected campaign is encouraging residents aged 55 and over to stay socially connected and engaged within their communities. The campaign seeks to address loneliness and social isolation by promoting local activities, volunteering opportunities and community participation.

Support for Unpaid Carers

Government has launched a new action plan focused on recognising and supporting unpaid carers. Residents providing care for family members or friends may benefit from support services available through Norfolk County Council and partner organisations.

Flooding and Environmental Resilience

Reclaim the Rain Programme

The Reclaim the Rain project continues to support flood resilience across Norfolk and Suffolk. The programme promotes sustainable drainage measures and practical solutions designed to help communities better manage flood risk and improve long-term water resilience. Examples of good practice are being shared through local projects and schools.

Nature Recovery and Biodiversity

The Government has published its 30by30 Land Delivery Plan, which aims to ensure that 30% of England's land is managed for nature recovery by 2030. Norfolk's important landscapes, habitats and environmental assets mean local communities may have opportunities to contribute to biodiversity and habitat improvement initiatives.

Community Safety

Trading Standards Enforcement Activity

Norfolk Trading Standards, working alongside Norfolk Police and HMRC, continues to tackle the sale of illicit tobacco and vaping products. Significant quantities of illegal products have been seized across the county during recent enforcement operations, helping to protect residents and legitimate businesses.

Police and Crime Commissioner

Following the recent election of Norfolk's new Police and Crime Commissioner, consultation will begin on a new Police and Crime Plan. This will provide opportunities for residents and local councils to help shape future policing priorities across the county. [norfolk.gov.uk]

Council Decisions

Budget Adjustments Agreed by the Leader of the Council

Following recent budget reviews, the Leader of Norfolk County Council has taken two significant delegated decisions affecting council funding priorities during 2026/27.

Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service Funding

Funding originally allocated to the proposed Norfolk Community Fund has been redirected to Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service.

The decision follows increasing operational pressures on the service, with activity increasing by 73% over the last five years. Factors contributing to this increase include extreme weather events and incidents involving lithium-ion batteries.

As a result, the Norfolk Community Fund will not proceed during 2026/27. However, the council has confirmed that support for the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector remains important and a separate £3.25 million grant funding programme funded through the Crisis and Resilience Fund is expected to be launched in the near future.

Highways Local Member Fund

The Leader has also taken the decision that the Highways Local Member Fund will not continue for new schemes during the current financial year.

The funding will instead be redirected towards highway maintenance and repairing Norfolk's road network. The intention is to reduce the maintenance backlog and increase preventative maintenance work to help reduce the number of potholes developing in the future.

The council has stated that increasing investment in highway maintenance is considered the most effective way to improve road conditions for residents and businesses across Norfolk.

Projects already approved and being delivered through the 2025/26 allocation will continue unaffected. However, new proposals, including many small-scale local

highway improvement schemes and new speed limit requests, are likely to be impacted.

Funding Opportunities available for local projects

Parish Partnership Scheme

The Parish Partnership Scheme continues to provide support for projects such as:

- Vehicle Activated Signs
- Bus stop improvements
- Footpath enhancements
- Cycle facilities
- Road safety projects

Funding is generally available for up to 50% of eligible project costs. [\[norfolk.gov.uk\]](https://www.norfolk.gov.uk)

Bus Infrastructure Funding

Additional support is available for bus stop infrastructure improvements, with funding available for:

- Bus shelters
- Seating
- Lighting
- Cycle parking

Funding may cover up to 80% of eligible project costs. [\[norfolk.gov.uk\]](https://www.norfolk.gov.uk)

Community Funding Opportunities

Further funding streams currently available include:

- Best Start Family Hub Grants
- Norfolk Crisis and Resilience Grant Programme
- Recycling Credits Scheme
- Digital business support grants

These programmes may support local community projects, family activities, building improvements and initiatives aimed at improving local wellbeing. [\[norfolk.gov.uk\]](https://www.norfolk.gov.uk)

Keeping in Touch

If you would like further information on any of the issues highlighted above, or if there are local matters you would like me to raise with Norfolk County Council, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Kind Regards,

Margaret Thomas

County Councillor for West Depwade